Welcome to Our New President

It gives me great pleasure to welcome the new president of the AAFLP, Dr. Ron Flowers. Of course, I’m not really introducing someone you don’t already know. In fact, Ron’s involvement and help, his influence and support, have been greatly appreciated during the many years he served as the General Conference Family Ministries Director. We are delighted that in his retirement he has accepted the AAFLP’s board invitation to lead this association during the next two years. Ron Flowers served the Department of Family Ministries, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists from January, 1980, until his retirement in June, 2010. Ron’s background is in pastoral ministry. He holds a Doctor of Ministry, with an emphasis in marriage and family counseling, from Denver Seminary. Certified with the National Council on Family Relations as a family life educator, he and his wife, Karen, have presented family life seminars on marriage, parenting and family living in some 85 countries. He has authored or co-authored with Karen more than 30 major books, manuals and resources on family ministries, including The Family: A School of Human Relations (Inter-American Division Publishing Association, 2009). The Flowers have two adult sons: Jeff, who with his wife, Pam, works in development in Azerbaijan, and Jon, who is a genetics researcher at New York University in Manhattan, New York.

As the board considered who could lead the AAFLP for the next two years, Ron’s name came quickly to everyone’s minds because of training, background, and the broad experience he brings to this post. Many of us have known Ron at a professional level, but some of us have also spent time with him and Karen on a more personal level and know them to be very kind, loving, and personable. While we look forward to his leadership, we also look forward to spending time in good fellowship with him. According to the AFFLP’s guidelines and the vote taken by the board, Ron’s term of office begins on January 1, 2012 and runs until December 31, 2013. Please join me in welcoming Ron and in praying that God will bless him and the AAFLP under his administration. 

Claudio Consuegra is director of Family Ministries for the North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and Executive Director of the Adventist Association of Family Life Professionals. Pamela Consuegra is the Associate Director of the NAD Family Ministries Department.
Guest Editorial

with Willie Oliver

Excellence In Leadership

Jorge Mayer is a committed and dedicated man. A husband of one wife (Nibia) and father of three adult children (Ronald, Lissie, and Kevin), this native of Argentina is a charter member and the sixth and longest serving president of the Adventist Association of Family Life Professionals (January 1, 2006-December 31, 2011) since it began operating during the summer of 1991.

A pastor’s son and himself an ordained minister in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Dr. Jorge Mayer has been active as an Adventist minister for over 30 years, serving in various capacities from youth pastor at the River Plate Adventist University Church to Associate Dean of men at the same institution. In the United States, he’s served as a literature evangelist in the Central California Conference; as a pastor and Hispanic coordinator in the Potomac and Michigan Conferences; as vice president for Spanish language ministries in the Florida Conference; and since 2002 as Hispanic ministries director for the Southern Union Conference with offices in Decatur, Georgia.

A dedicated scholar, Jorge is a Theology graduate of River Plate Adventist University in Entre Rios, Argentina, and a graduate of the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University, having completed studies for the Master of Divinity and Doctor of Ministry degrees. Jorge’s DMin research is titled A Model for Training Church Family Life Directors Among the Hispanic Churches in the Michigan Conference.

Serving long deserves recognition. However, serving long and serving well raises the bar of excellence to a completely different level. This is the case with Jorge Mayer, who I have had the privilege of working closely with—as Executive Director of AAFLP—for five of his six-year tenure. During this time a number of important decisions were made to provide greater services to the membership of the organization, as well as expanding certification possibilities. Below are a few of the important decisions made during Jorge’s presidency of AAFLP:

- Action 06-7: To further study the possibility of an Adventist Certified Family Life Educator (ACFLE) and an Adventist Family Life Educator (AFLE) designation for members of AAFLP that meet the requirements (voted October 5, 2006).
- Action 07-5: To adopt a two-tier membership system with lifetime membership ($150) and annually renewable memberships ($40) beginning in January 1, 2008 (voted January 5, 2007).
- Action 07-6: To accept the AAFLP certification proposal presented by Allan Martin as provisional certification from AAFLP for those taking the graduate certificate in the Family Life Education program. A similar course work may be offered by other institutions for the same provisional certification from AAFLP (voted January 5, 2007).
- Action 07-12: To extend the 10% spouse discount to the lifetime membership as of January 2008 (voted July 18, 2007).
- Action 07-13: To establish an AAFLP annual award for young professionals/graduate students in family studies/family life education named the Youngberg Award (voted July 18, 2007).
- Action 07-16: To accept the AAFLP certification level I and II as recommended by the certification sub-committee (voted July 18, 2007).
- Action 07-17: To establish an AAFLP certification ad hoc committee (voted July 18, 2007).
- Action 08-4: To establish a Youngberg Award nomination process (voted July 1, 2008).
- Action 09-11: To inaugurate the Mazat award in 2009, with recipients being outstanding young professionals/graduate students in family therapy from Andrews University and Loma Linda University (voted January 16, 2009).

While there are only so many board actions I can share with you during Jorge’s storied tenure as president of AAFLP before you begin to yawn or lose interested,

Thank you, Jorge, for your outstanding services to AAFLP during the last six years as president.

Editorial continued on page 4
An Ethical Dilemma for Pastors

Pastors occupy many roles in society in addition to those of their professional responsibilities. While many of these responsibilities do not raise ethical concerns, counseling by its very nature, can create challenging ethical situations. The following vignette, illustrates the ethical dilemma of a pastor/counselor, and helps to illustrate the possible ethical bind a pastor may find himself/herself in. The steps this pastor took can be helpful for other pastors who might face similar situations.

The Molested Teenager

Ruth is a mature-looking fifteen-year-old girl. Her parents are ardent Christians. She is involved in many youth activities in her church, and is very popular among her peers. Her parents have many close family friends whose children are of Ruth’s age. Their homes have been open and accessible to each other.

One morning Ruth was home alone when one of their family friends visited. There was no obvious reason for the visit; however, they sat on the couch and chatted for some time. After a while, the family friend became more familiar and Ruth became more uncomfortable. It did not take long from that point before the visitor sexually molested her.

Before he left, he told her he was sorry and begged her not to tell anyone. He even made threats, and reminded her of his past kindness towards her. Ruth felt confused and dirty but she was afraid to tell her parents, so she kept it secret. The perpetrator of the crime still came to her house for family gatherings while he pretended that nothing had happened.

Several months passed after the incident it happened again. This time he was more aggressive and demanding. The pain, shame, and guilt were more intense than before. After several weeks of inner struggle, Ruth told her best friend, who disclosed the secret and eventually her parents heard about it. They brought Ruth in to their pastor for counseling. However, they made it abundantly clear to him that they did not want to press charges: they wanted to keep the police out of the matter in order to protect their daughter’s reputation.

With this kind of ethical dilemma, several questions emerged for the pastor. Were the parents asking him to protect a family secret? Do they understand the implications of the law regarding abused minors? If he reported the matter, would they or his members lose their trust in him? Would others fear to confide in him? Would the family leave his church and would other members leave as well? What further negative impact would there be on his ministry?

The Dilemma.

There are four principles at stake. First, there is a legal issue to be resolved. Whenever a minor is abused, the law requires the professional to make a report “or cause a report to be made.” Second, there is a competing professional issue, the member’s expectation that the pastor will be trustworthy and treat private information confidentially. Third, there are ethical issues of justice and fidelity. And fourth, there are moral issues relating to the violation of a child and the protection of the vulnerable and innocent.

Course of Action

• The pastor reviewed the legal requirements of the law. Social Services Law Title 6 section 413 includes a list of officials that are required to report cases of suspected child abuse or maltreatment. Among the persons listed are Christian Science practitioners. Even though pastors are not Christian Science practitioners, they are Christian professionals and a lawyer could argue that they too have a duty to report suspected cases of child abuse.

• He discussed the case, without identifying the family, with two mentors in the helping profession in the light of the family’s concern and the legal implications of the law.

• He met with the entire family to explore and discuss the following:

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I must include Jorge’s penchant for raising funds and giving unexpected gifts to those who worked with him in this volunteer organization.

More than once I experienced the granting of gift cards by Jorge— at the conclusion of an especially productive board meeting—to board members and other conference directors of Family Ministries who wandered into AAFLP board meetings, when they took place during other North American Division meetings.

It got to the place where at least one non-board member was the recipient of Jorge’s largess on more than one occasion—prompting a number of board members to believe the person in question was on to Jorge’s generosity and intentional about being at the right place at the right time as often as possible.

The truth is AAFLP has operated with very slim financial margins over the years. During Jorge’s tenure, however, this has never been the case. The financial bottom-line has always been strong, the spirits of the organization positive, and the mission of AAFLP never more focused than during the last six years of the organization.

Although no longer the executive director of AAFLP, I am going to miss Jorge’s calm, humble, unassuming but unmistakable thoughtfulness, dedication, devotion, commitment, enthusiasm, and loyalty to AAFLP’s lofty ideals of promoting excellence in family life-education, research, and counseling.

I take this opportunity to thank Jorge for his outstanding services to AAFLP during the last six years as president. Jorge was actively involved with AAFLP before becoming president, and there is no doubt in my mind he will continue to be keenly involved in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead. God’s speed my friend.

Willie Oliver is director of family ministries for the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and former Executive Director of AAFLP.

Perspective from page 3

a) The ethical dilemma the situation posed for him
b) The family’s right to privacy and confidentiality
c) The legal requirements of the law
d) The need to bring the perpetrator to justice to safeguard other teens
e) In case of a cover up, the statute of limitation can run for a long time
f) The minor may eventually reveal the matter to her counselor or some other mandated professional and that could have legal implications for the Pastor later
g) The fact that others already knew of the case because Ruth disclosed

The Outcome

After careful consideration and much deliberation, the family decided that they would report the matter to the police. Notice the Pastor did not make the report; therefore, he stood in good grace with his parishioners. However, by “causing the report to be made” he fulfilled the legal requirements of the law. If the parents failed to report the case however, the pastor would be required to report the case.

Conclusion

Pastors, regardless of the counseling setting, carry responsibilities unique to their job roles. With these responsibilities come ethical demands. It is one thing to enjoy the privileges of ministry but it is quite another thing for the pastor to maintain a high ethical standard. By God’s grace, let us protect those we serve!

Alanzo Smith is Director for Family Counseling, Men’s Ministry, Personal Ministry, and Sabbath School in the Greater New York Conference. June Smith is a professor at Long Island University.

Questions for Discussion:

1. How can pastors foster a culture of zero tolerance for child abuse in the congregation?
2. What can parents do to protect their children from sexual abuse by family and friends?
3. How can parents make it easy for their children to talk to them about serious matters?
Thinking About Thinking

People long for positive life experiences, self-confidence, and deliverance from suffering. Our minds are able to discover ways to turn our longings into reality.

We are called to use our God-given power of thinking. Ellen White was a thinker. She had much to say about the powers, wonders, and responsibilities of positive thinking. She wrote, “The mind is a trust from God. The powers of the mind are to be cultivated. They are to be so wisely used that they will increase in strength. Each one is to use his entrusted talents in a way that the greatest good will be done.”

Thinking is a skill that can be developed

Thinking is a skill and one we can always get better at if we take the time to think about your thinking! The brain is incredible in its ability to take in information, but what it does with this information is a unique process that, in part, results from your own thinking. For example, if you are thinking about something at one level and someone else is thinking at another level, do you think you will end up with the same results? The answer is “No” because each person processes information very differently. Thinking along that same line, what if you take current information you have and change the way you are thinking about it, should you come out with a different result? The answer is “Yes!”

I invite you to think about these levels of thinking skills. Which do you use the most? Think how this information could be useful in your ministry to families.

- Knowledge—This is basic fact of word gathering. We do fact gathering all our lives, but especially when we are young.
- Understanding—Facts don’t mean much unless you understand what they mean
- Analyze—This is pushing into high-level thinking. It requires the knowledge, understanding, and the risk of applying this knowledge. Many quit thinking at this level because it takes great effort.
- Creativity—New thinking! Creativity requires you to take old facts you’ve understood and come up with whole new ways to use them.
- Evaluating—This is the toughest level. One has to place value or judgment on an object or idea. Sometimes we have to reject our current way of thinking, and with that comes different ways to do things. How creative!

Thinking is very important to individuals, and within families. Do you want to build your own thinking skills? Do you want your children and other important people to be involved in thinking to the best of their ability? You can set the stage. An idea to improve thinking is to imagine. Imagination is a high-level thinking skill that requires creativity, analysis, and, in some cases, evaluation, if what you are imagining is also to have a practical application later on.

Brainstorming can be great fun and an important step in problem-solving. Think about how to do this for yourself, at home or in your congregation. For example, with your family at the dinner table, come up with ideas to keep the house cleaner that you can all work on together. Take time to brainstorm ideas to change how and what you do at work, find ideas that are more stimulating for you and better for the congregation.

Have you struggled with negative thinking, or know of someone who does? We ask ourselves, “Why would anyone choose to be a negative thinker?” For many, being a negative thinker comes out of childhood experiences. We got into this habit of thinking something wouldn’t work out for us; that we weren’t good enough; that if we tried we’d fail. It doesn’t take too many times of raising your hand with an answer, getting it wrong and hearing the kids laugh at you before you interpret the world from a more negative slant. This misinterpretation of the world around us as being scary, hard, and awful, leads us to negative thinking patterns.

By the time a child is eleven years old, most have stopped making attempts at artistic creativity, usually because early attempts have been ridiculed or didn’t measure up. I believe there’s a correlation here to our creative thinking in general. The negative thinking habits we pick up as we are growing up are usually the ones we keep using as adults. They protected us as children, and we continue to turn to them as a coping mechanism.

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BOUNDARY CROSSINGS

By Peter Swanson

Oh the torment of complicated relationships! Fortunate indeed is the person who hasn’t suffered through such entanglements! Family life professionals and pastors will inevitably encounter people who find themselves trapped in difficult relationships. And they too can find themselves distressingly stuck in problematical relationships.

Recognizing the damage that can be done to clients, and the dangers to the well-being of therapists and their practices, professional organizations have imposed restrictions on dual relationships; and regulations on multiple relationships. It is the ethical responsibility of mental-health professionals to establish their boundaries, maintain those boundaries, and inform their clients about the boundaries.1

In their strictest form, boundary violations refer to any kind of therapist’s relationship with the client outside of the professional relationship. So the therapist may not have a social or business relationship with the client in addition to the therapeutic relationship; and contact with the client outside of the therapist’s office is prohibited or strictly limited. Boundary violations occur when the therapist exploits the client sexually, in business transactions, or when the regulations of the state or of managed care are contravened.

Boundary crossings are different from boundary violations. While some boundary crossings are potentially harmful, others may prove beneficial and may properly be included as part of treatment. For instance, going with a client, who suffers from social anxiety, to a quiet restaurant for a meal may be very therapeutic even though it crosses the boundary between a professional relationship and a social experience. Recognizing the potential benefits of certain boundary crossings, various professional organizations employ differing ethical guidelines to inform the practice of their members.2 But they stand united in their condemnation of boundary violations.

In the context of a congregation, a mental-health practitioner may be asked by the pastor to talk to a member who seems to be very depressed. As an elder of the church, this is part of this volunteer’s “job description.” But when the call to the person’s home moves beyond the usual religious expectations of such a visit into the realm of diagnosis and treatment, the elder/therapist might arguably be justified in requiring a fee for services. Yet the depressed person, who neither asked for the visit nor for the treatment, may suffer a deepening of the depression secondary to this new unwanted source of conflict and disillusionment.

This would be an example of a boundary violation, for had the counselor billed for services, that would have been an exploitation of a vulnerable person’s situation.

Similarly, Adventist professionals who move beyond the family life education role toward marital therapy in their interactions with fellow members of the congregation engage in a boundary crossing that can significantly change the dynamics of their former relationship with the couple for better or for worse. In this case, assuming that the therapy was provided on a pro bono basis, it would probably not be viewed as a boundary violation; but it could likely be a serious boundary crossing should there be a negative outcome. On the other hand, if the couple benefitted considerably from the help provided by the skilled mental-health professional, the boundary crossing might be viewed as clinically and ethically defensible.

The following vignette illustrates how two individuals could innocently cross many boundaries and develop a multi-faceted relationship that has potential benefit for each of them, and also for the congregation.

They are work associates; attend the same church; work together with the Pathfinders; attend the same church committees and functions; drive together to give Bible studies; often visit in each other’s homes; eat out together one-on-one; run occasional errands for each other; exchange hugs in public; give each other gifts; describe themselves as best friends; go on vacation together.

There’s no problem if two middle-aged widows engage in these activities, and manage well these multiple, non-sexual relationships. Likewise, there’s no problem if two single, thirty-something males were the individuals in the scenario, provided no one thought of them as gay.

But this could be a serious violation of the congregation’s sense of propriety if the two were a single male and a single female – unless, of course, they were members of the same family.

Clearly, boundary crossings in some situations/cultural settings seem quite appropriate, yet the very same boundary crossings fail the “appearance-of-evil” test3 under different circumstances.

Crossings continued on page 7
Crossings from page 6

How shall we think about these matters? Shall we simply shrug this off because of the almost infinite variety of possible circumstances and the wide range of personal opinions about what is, and what is not a detrimental boundary crossing? Shall we lean upon situational ethics to guide our practice?

I propose that members of the Adventist Association of Family Life Professionals are called to a higher standard with respect to boundary violations than are members of secular professional organizations. The moral compass of Adventist mental-health professionals, which is fully in alignment with the Word of God, calls them to unswerving purity of mind and heart which, in turn, leads to interactions with their clients that are above reproach. And the golden rule precludes any action that would take advantage of another person.

With respect to boundary crossings, we need to develop and embrace ethical guidelines to help us discern how to minister in ways that will not cause harm, that will promote the greatest benefit to those we serve, and that will stand up to unfriendly scrutiny from our detractors.

We need to have some means of determining under which circumstances a boundary crossing is justifiable and when it is suspect.

We might begin by emphasizing the importance of being able to identify where boundaries need to be drawn, and how to identify boundary crossings. We also need to have some means of determining under which circumstances a boundary crossing is justifiable and when it is suspect.

A review of the ethical guidelines of several professional organizations revealed a measure of agreement about the following issues:

- It is the professional’s responsibility to ensure that no sexual contact, impropriety, or harassment of the client occurs, and that no romantic relationships develop with clients.
- A counseling relationship shall not be established with family members, close friends, colleagues, or persons in an administrative or supervisory relationship with the therapist.
- Aside from appropriate fees for service, therapists shall avoid all business/financial transactions with clients, and shall refrain from any actions that shall in any way use the counseling relationship to benefit the therapist personally, professionally, politically, or in other ways.
- Where unavoidable concurrent dual/multiple relationships occur, it is the therapist’s responsibility to ensure that professional judgment and objectivity are not impaired; that appropriate safeguards are put in place to prevent exploitation of, and harm to the client; and that a consulting/supervisory relationship is established to oversee the course of treatment.

These observations about how other professional organizations address the ethics of boundary crossings can inform our conversation about this important matter, and about how these principles can be applied to the practices of members of the Adventist Association of Family Life Professionals.

The very nature of pastoral ministry involves multiple relationships: pastor-parishioner, chair person of committees, teacher/trainer of volunteers, supervisor of lay-ministry volunteers, and in some instances, the provider of pre-marital, and pastoral counseling. Similarly, Family Life Professionals will likely find themselves in dual or multiple relationships with individuals in their church home. Our professionalism and our personal integrity will be revealed by the way we manage these challenging relationships.

Peter Swanson teaches courses in Pastoral Care and Counseling at the Seminary at Andrews University, and is editor of Family Life. You may send comments to swansonp@andrews.edu

1Some of the material in this column was adapted from two excellent articles that may be accessed by using these two links: http://kspope.com/dual/index.php and http://www.zurinstitute.com/dualrelationships.html
2http://kspope.com/ethcodes/index.php
31 Thessalonians 5:22
Parenting from page 5

Unfortunately this negative thinking colors our world. Every day we can dwell on thoughts like: How could another person do this to me? This person is hurting me. This person is talking about me. . . . I need to be sure this doesn't happen to me again (and be ready to be angry if it does happen again).

Or, we can commit to changing our negative thinking patterns and use our God-given gift of creative thinking. We can decide to focus our thinking on the positive rather than wasting our energies on negative thinking. When we find ourselves caught in a negative thinking rut, we can challenge ourselves to open our minds and expand our vision of things to think about.

Ellen White encourages us with a challenge and a promise, “The positiveness and energy, the solidity and strength of character manifested in Christ are to be developed in us through the same discipline that He endured. And the grace that He received is for us.”

To become a creative, positive, thinker means taking a step to be vulnerable and open. You can find that with just baby-steps towards more positive thinking that it is an exhilarating feeling to find, or be back in touch with, this positive part of yourself!

I invite you to accept God’s desires for your heart and mind. “Let the soul be drawn out and upward that God may grant us a breath of the heavenly atmosphere. We may keep so near to God that in every unexpected trial our thoughts will turn to Him as naturally as the flower turns to the sun.”

As a family life professional, I invite you to celebrate how you use your thinking skills, utilizing your talents and circumstances to assist families in learning how to be positive, creative thinkers for God.

Sue Murray is a spouse, a passionate mother, grandmother, and loyal friend. A retired Andrews University professor, her teaching focus was in the areas of Family Studies and Social Work.

Questions for Discussion:

1. Do we all have the same potential for the development of our minds?
2. What limitations do we place on ourselves that inhibit the development of our minds?
3. How can we make the various kinds of thinking enjoyable for our children?

1. White, Ellen G. Mind, Character, and Personality vol. 2 p. 665
2. White, Ellen G. Desire of Ages p. 73
3. White, Ellen G. Steps to Christ pp. 99, 100